Library

JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

LUCY McLUCKIE

R
977.32
M226o

For Reference

Not to be taken from this room

R
977.32
M2260

JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWEE AGREEMENT

This manuscript numbering . pages is a transcript of one or more tape-recorded interviews with me. Any reader should bear in mind that he is reading a transcript of my spoken rather than my written word.

It is understood that the Joliet Junior College Learning Resource Center will allow others to read and utilize this manuscript and/or the tapes from time to time in connection with the educational purposes of the College and in accordance with the usual standards of the Learning Resource Center.

I hereby give and grant to Joliet Junior College as a donation for such scholarly and educational purposes as the College shall determine the full use of this information.

Understood and agreed to

Interviewers	Interviewee
J. H. Nelson (signature)	Lucy McLinchie (signature)
(signature)	70 Gordon Ave (address)
(signature)	Coal City, Ill (city & state)
(date)	(date)

JJC
11-19-75

JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE LIBRARY
JOLIET, ILLINOIS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

History of Area Mines ---------- 5

Famous G-Shaft Candy ---------- 6

Railroads ---------- 7

Schools ---------- 8

Depression ---------- 9

Collecting Unique Fossils (Nodules) ---------- 9

Diamond Mine Disaster ---------- 10

Deep Mines ---------- 11

Other Area Industries ---------- 12

The Recreation Clubs ---------- 13

Finding the Nodule Pockets ---------- 14

Strip Mines ---------- 15

Loaning Fossils ---------- 16

The Harvard University Fossil Collection ---------- 17

INTERVIEWEE: Mrs. Lucy McLuckie

INTERVIEWER: Jeff Nelson

NELSON: This in an interview with Mrs. Lucy McLuckie for the Joliet Junior College Oral History Program by Jeff Nelson on April 25, 1975.

NELSON: Mrs, McLuckie, would you give us a little history on the mines in this area?

McLUCKIE: In 1820 this Canadian trader Peter Lansa (I never heard of the man before) -- but there was coal on the surface wherever he picked it up, and it was in such demand that they began sinking mines. I think the Big Sink and the Big Four-Five-Six-Seven they began from Wilmington. Mr. Skimmer, he began a mine; but I don't remember the name. You see, in those days, there was no transportation; everybody had to walk, so the miners had to live close to the mines. Oh, they came in from all countries, all nationalities, Scotch, Irish, Polish, Italian -- oh, just every nationality you can mention! All came to work in the mines; they came to Braidwood. From Braidwood they would move into the towns. At first, when Coal City began, the Bohemians all lived on one end, the Scotch people on one end, the Irish people way down, the Italian people were all locally-lived; and they just couldn't live too far. So when the mine had dug as far as they could, they would close that mine and sink another one. Sometimes the people even moved the houses with them instead of only the furniture. That's how Coal City got its name.

NELSON: They didn't start strip-mining then?

McLUCKIE: No. That was in the 1820's they began the deep mines.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2020 with funding from
Joliet Junior College Library

https://archive.org/details/mcluckielucy00joli

NELSON: They started with coal mines and . . .

McLUCKIE: That was the deep mines where. . . Oh, well, wherever you see a so-called dump, that is where a mine was. Mr. Skimmer from Wilmington, I think he lived closer to Coal City at the time, he would just name his mines, A, B, C, D, all down the alphabet. The G-Shaft was over near Braidwood, and the reason I can remember that was because some people by the name of Williamson began making candy and called it G-Shaft. This is the only area it's available at Christmas time. It's known by everybody that lives here. First thing you know we had a wire rope factory, clothing factory, clay products; people needed these things so they just began spreading out. First thing you know it got to the point where. . . I think it got to almost 6,000. Then we had this diamond mine tragedy where the water came in and killed so many miners. In those days they began mining when they were thirteen or fourteen. It killed boys, too, drowned them, as the miners began working away. Coal City faded a little bit, but we're over 3,000 and it's growing. Coal City is growing steadily because so many workers go to Caterpillar. Of course, there were so many that worked at the plant, and they traveled out because they have cars now. Our strip-mining began about 1928.

NELSON: That wasn't very long ago.

McLUCKIE: No. Well, that's quite a few years. I remember John was a miner over in Verona, and he stopped and went to the railroad. He was in maintenance there. When the strip-mine began getting in machinery, he stopped the railroad and went out and he worked on the job of building the first drag line. First they had to drain the land because this is

a low spot; and it being undermined, the whole town is undermined. That's why we have cracks on our plaster. Our houses are settling. That's what the insurance man tells us. They dug. . . at first they dug drainage ditches up there, and they moved the machinery in, and John began helping on the job of building this drag line. Then, when it was built, he began working with it. He went from ground man to oiler and finally operator.

NELSON: What does an "operator" do?

McLUCKIE: The operator is the one that runs the drag line, and that's top.

NELSON: What railroads came through here?

McLUCKIE: The Santa Fe and the Ohio and Baltimore, the Chicagoan and the Rock Island.

NELSON: Did they take coal out in trains?

McLUCKIE: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. In those days, a distance job, they had to go out with flatcars full of coal. I remember seeing so many trains go down the railroad just all cars of coal.

NELSON: Where did the coal go, Chicago?

McLUCKIE: Everywhere. Wherever it was needed. I believe this area is the best coal-producing area anywhere. Of course, it is sort of fading out now. Near down the southern part of our area. . . there is still coal under our land. I wouldn't be surprised to see people come back and open up that mine and produce more coal. That's how Coal City got its name -- Coal City.

JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE LIBRARY
JOLIET, ILLINOIS

NELSON: Sounds logical.

McLUCKIE: Oh, yes.

NELSON: Remember when you said people came from other countries here to work?

McLUCKIE: Oh, they came. I know my parents came in the early 1890's. There were people that came before that. At that time, they used to come into Braidwood instead of Coal City. They would just come to Braidwood and spread out. They came from every country. Any countries that had workers that had to earn a living came.

NELSON: How did they school these people? Did they all speak different languages? Did they all speak English or what?

McLUCKIE: Oh, they all talked their own language, you bet. (Laughter) Of course, they soon learned to talk English to get around because, as my father put it, "You can go anywhere in the world if you have the tongue in your mouth to make yourself understood."

NELSON: How did they school them then? Like the young. . .

McLUCKIE: Well, we soon got schools. Coal City had two schools. That's where I went. Coal City School, down there where the Post Office is now, that's where John went. In those days everybody stayed in their own little spot because the only transportation was horse and buggy. There weren't many people that could afford them.

NELSON: The Depression did hit this place, then?

McLUCKIE: What?

NELSON: Did the Depression hit this town?

McLUCKIE: Oh, yes. Sure the Depression hit us. Of course, with the mines there were quite a few strikes in the summertime. Oh, conditions were bad at first, but they worked all winter. Then summer would come, and they would strike again for better conditions. They began climbing. Coal City came up the hard way.

NELSON: When did they discover fossils in this area?

McLUCKIE: Well, fossils were found along the creek at first.

NELSON: What creek was that?

McLUCKIE: The Mazon Creek. At those times we called it Mazon Creek, but now they call it Mazon River. Mr. Daniels and Mr. Carr from Morris, I believe from what I read, they began picking them. . . You see, in the spring when the creek was swollen, it would wash the walls down in the river or creek bed. These folks would go hunting them along the bottom. It soon got out that all scientists in this part of the country heard about them, and they began coming in and working on them. In fact, I have some books that belong to Mr. Daniels from Morris. He. . . this group of books were written by a Dr. Lesquereux who was a palaeontologist. I think he worked through Washington, D. C.

NELSON: The one's here in this book. . . where they found it in a shell?

McLUCKIE: Yes. You see, in other parts of the country, fossils, the same as we find here in nodules, were found in shale. Only in this area do they find them in nodules. That's why they call them Mazon Creek Nodules, or Mazon Creek Fossils. In the courthouse over in Morris

there's a couple of tables that show displays of fossils that were found in the creek by Carr and Daniels. I think it's mostly Carr's fossils that are there. I do believe that the fossils we find over in the strip mine are in much better condition, and I know there are a number of creatures and vegetation that are found over there that were never found in the creek.

NELSON: Did they find animals over in the creek then, too? In the concretions?

McLUCKIE: Yes, I believe they did; but, I think in the latter part, the more common -- I don't see any plates of them; but, for instance, even over at Peabody where it was operating lately, there were creatures there that had never been found anywhere else in the world...although we find Pennsylvania Fossils very similar to what they find in Germany. But over at Peabody there were creatures that are marine life that was never found in Germany.

NELSON: Could you tell me about this disaster -- this diamond mine disaster?

McLUCKIE: Well, I should, because I believe it was just before my time; but a youngster isn't likely to remember things like that because I didn't live down there.

NELSON: Do you know how many people were killed or anything like that?

McLUCKIE: It tells you in some of these. I should have found it and underlined it, but I didn't because I was talking on the phone this morning.So I didn't take time to hunt these out. Let's see -- it tells you how many -- seventy-four men and boys.

NELSON: Seventy-four. . . in 1883.

McLUCKIE: In 1883 -- I wasn't born yet.

NELSON: When were you born -- Oh, can't ask a woman that, huh?

McLUCKIE: Oh -- (Laughter) -- I remember them speaking about it for a long time, but I was a youngster and didn't pay any attention. . . . Now there's Diamond...Eileen...Carbon Hill...they are all more or less a part of Coal City.

NELSON: Now are those the mines just around here?

McLUCKIE: Oh, those mines are all the way to South Wilmington, Braidwood, even Morris -- over to Goose Lake; of course, that's strip mining over there. These deep mines -- even Verona, because my husband worked there.

NELSON: How come they didn't strip the mines in this area? You can just see the tunnels -- you see the piles, you know. How come they didn't strip this area like they did. . .

McLUCKIE: Well, this was all deep mining before strip mining.

NELSON: So, this area was done first before they strip-mined them?

McLUCKIE: Oh, yes. These deep mines began in 1820. . . They began all these. . . Oh, Big Four, and the Star Mining Company up here in Number Seven, Braceville, Central City -- that's how they began. South Wilmington began because of coal mines. Even Braidwood prospered because of all the coal mines. Really, coal was the main thing.

NELSON: Do you have any other factories or anything like that around this area?

McLUCKIE: Oh, here we had a wire rope factory when I was a girl, because my brother worked there. That must have been in the early 1900's. Then they began the clay pit, brickyard, and a clothing factory, and wallpaper mill. We had quite a few things to keep this part of town going. Then, of course, with the First War and the Second they began building these plants; and, oh, quite a few people would travel over there and work. They began this Caterpillar out of Joliet, and so many are still working there.

NELSON: That's for sure. When did you start collecting fossils?

McLUCKIE: Well, John began about 1929.

NELSON: John was your husband?

McLUCKIE: Yes. And at that time Mr. George Langford and his son began out there, too. John began bringing Bill with him; and they ran into, or met, Doctor Wilson from North Park College in Chicago. Well, Dr. Wilson brought one of his geology books; and we began to study. By that time the fossil bed became famous, and they began coming in and coming in and hunting. They got to the point where so many from so many countries and states came that the hills became, more or less, cleaned up; but there's still occasions to go out and hunt because I know I do once in a great while. Last fall I still found two that I never had before.

NELSON: Are there any coal companies in the area still working?

McLUCKIE: No. Peabody just is completing their cleanup and have moved most of their machinery down to their other mine in Southern Illinois, although there's still some workers out there cleaning out. Most of the

area has been sold to Commonwealth Edison. Commonwealth Edison is building a huge cooling lake, somewhat like North at Dresden. Most of the area that had been stripped -- and the hills have more or less grown over -- have been taken up in spots by ceratin groups. Now they're all recreation areas; and the people that are members use them for picnicking, fishing, boating. There's. . . oh, South Wilmington has one; Braidwood has one; Wilmington has two; the Miners have one, and it was the first, really -- the Miners' area. It was through my husband that it began. He went out hunting fossils with Bill one day, and they climbed a hill. When they got to the top, they looked over into the water on the other side, and it was just covered with ducks and geese. John told Bill to be quiet -- they went down and went over to the office (that was Northern Illinois at that time). Mr. Rettenmyer and Mr. Weimer and Bill May went with John, and he showed them where all these ducks and geese were; and John suggested what a wonderful thing it would be, and that's how it began. John was the first president of that area. When other people began to hear about that area, then they began buying up other areas. There's Commonwealth Edison -- Coal City area has one. The Miners' and the Wilmington -- Oh, there's two there on (Route) 113; and they're both Wilmington Recreation areas...Braidwood and South Wilmington...So all the areas have been taken up, and they're all really kept in pretty good order. One has to be a member to go in, but it's all worthwhile if a person is interested in that.

NELSON: Did the nationalities in the town ever get back together?

McLUCKIE: Oh, they're intermarried. Bohemians married Italians and Scotch -- Well, for instance, I'm Italian; I married a Scotch. Now

they're all mixed up, and you wouldn't know the difference. I think there are folks growing up around here that probably has three and four nationalities. Oh, they got along; at first it was difficult, but it soon wore down.

NELSON: Where do you find most of your nodules?

McLUCKIE: Our nodules, most of them, come from Northern Illinois between Wilmington and Coal City. At first they were so plentiful that I never dreamed there would come a time when a person would have difficulty going out and finding a nice one. Lately, I've gone out and come home empty-handed because they're just not there; and the hills are more or less settled. Well, as John used to say, "They'll occur in pockets." With the drag line that he operated, when he'd go through a pocket and spill it over on the hill, he'd know just about the best place to go and hunt then. I remember finding so many that when we'd fill our bags, the bags would be too heavy; and we would spill them all out and pick only the best ones that we wanted to keep and left the other ones there for somebody else. And when we would come back, do you know, we never found any of those! They'd have all been picked up by somebody else -- so there were other folks hunting. We gave fossils to so many people that came in from other states -- and , really, we had to -- we couldn't keep them all, there were too many. We had to move on if we kept them all. I remember our boys both belonged to the Boy Scouts. One week they had Camporee, and every boy had to bring something to give to the others. Our boys brought two bushelsful of fossils just to pass out to the other boys. I couldn't believe that the day would come that they were all gone. Occasionally, there's one or two work out. In Peabody Mine they find so many marine fossils that aren't found anywhere. They're

still studying them and naming them; they haven't named them all. The mine is closed. I haven't been over there for a couple of years, but they say that they're still finding a few.

NELSON: Could you tell me where downtown Coal City used to be? The same area, or what?

McLUCKIE: Downtown Coal City -- well, this is downtown.

NELSON: Has it always been here?

McLUCKIE: Oh, yes. John's folks...their house was always down at that end. I came from Suffernville which was down at this end. No, the town hasn't shifted, but it has spread out -- areas that had never had houses in the old days. Oh, they're built up now, beautiful homes. Most of the people that own those houses worked out of town.

NELSON: Do you think they should stop strip mining?

McLUCKIE: I've had so much pleasure out of strip mining that I would say I wish they'd continue. We have met so many folks from everywhere -- other countries. I've often wondered what we would have done if it hadn't been for the strip mining. The strip mining has really been one of the main things in our life, and we've enjoyed it. It was work and a living because my oldest son worked there at first before he went to Caterpillar. I'm still enjoying results from the strip mining. Folks are still coming -- this Saturday I had twenty-five here, and some of them were repeaters. Some of them were new. I wish they would continue stripping; but the coal in this area, I understand, has more sulphur in it than is legal, three percent or something like that. I think the time

will come when somebody's going to discover a way to clear that out. Peabody owns a great deal of land that has never been stripped, and the coal is still there.

NELSON: I know you have a big fossil collection downstairs, but do you have fossils named after you?

McLUCKIE: Oh, there must be six of them with our name, but we have some that are considered very rare. As Doctor Richardson said, "It's just about the most complete collection." We have some that they don't have at the museum, and they've been borrowed. Some of our fossils have gone to the School of Mines in Colorado. I've heard some tourists tell us that they were there and saw some of the fossils we sent when they asked for them. I know there's some down in the Philipine Islands that were sent there.

NELSON: Some of your fossils?

McLUCKIE: Yes. Of course, it was through the teacher -- Reverend Rigney, the teacher was here; he asked for them. The mail is so costly now, I don't think it would pay. We sent an awful lot of rocks away. I know there's Mr. Thompson, Fred Thompson, I think he was from Peoria -- he had been to London and has seen a collection of these Pennsylvania Fossils. It was a larger collection than he knew his school owned. His school was Harvard, I think. So during the Depression when he became ill, he came here; and he asked John to gather a group of schoolboys and oversee collecting a collection for Harvard that would be larger than the one in England. John was working at the time, so he knew a friend of his that didn't have a job; so he went to him and asked him if he would oversee it. John Herron gathered these boys, and they would go

out every day and hunt over at Northern Illinois. They ended up with such a large collection for Harvard, that at the end of it Mr. Thompson came and hired a boxcar on the railroad; and they packed all these fossils and sent them to Harvard. Harvard now has a larger collection than England. The doctor of Mr. Thompson had told him that he should devote time outdoors and do something to help himself -- and by collecting those fossils, that helped him.

NELSON: Well, if you can't think of anything else, I think we will end this.

McLUCKIE: Well, I think I've been talking quite a bit, don't you?

NELSON: It's been very interesting, and thank you for your time and interest in our program.

INDEX

alphabetically-named mines, 6
animal (fossils), 10

Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, 7
Big Five Mine, 5
Big Four Mine, 5
Big Seven Mine, 5
Big Sink Mine, 5
Big Six Mine, 5
boating, 13
Bohemians, 5, 13
Boy Scouts, 14
Braceville, 11
Braidwood, 5-6, 8,11, 13
brickyard, 12
brother, 12

Camporee, 14
Carbon Hill Mine, 11
Caterpillar, 6, 12, 15
Central City, 11
Chicago, 7
Chicagoan Railroad, 7
clay pit, 12
clay products, 6
clothing factory, 6, 12
coal, 5-7, 11, 15-16
Coal City, 5-9, 13-15
Caol City School, 8
Colorado School of Mines, 16
Commonwealth Edison, 13
cooling lake, 6
courthouse, Morris, 9
creatures (fossils), 10

Daniels, Mr., 9, 10
deep mines, 5-6, 11
Depression, 8-9, 16
Diamond Mine, 6, 10-11
disaster, 10
displays, fossil, 10
drag line, 6, 14
Dresden, 13
ducks, 13
dump, 6

Eileen Mine, 11
England, 16, 17

fishing, 13
flatcars, 7
fossil collection, 16-17
fossils, 9-10, 12-14, 16

G-Shaft candy, 6
G-Shaft Mine, 6
geese, 13
Germany, 10
"ground man", 7

Harvard University, 16, 17
Herron, Hohn, 16
horse and buggy (transportation), 8
husband, (John), 6-7, 11-16

Irish nationality, 5
Italian nationality, 5
Italians, 13

Joliet, 12

Langford, Mr. George, 12
Lansa, Peter, Canadian trader, 5
Lesquereux, Dr., palaeontologist, 9
London, 16

marine life (fossils), 10, 14
May, Bill, 13
Mazon Creek, 9-10
Mazon Creek Fossils, 9
Mazon Creed Nodules, 9
Mazon River, 9
mine(s), 5, 7, 9, 11, 14
miners, 5, 6, 13
Morris, 9, 11
museum, 16

nodules, 9, 14
Northern Illinois (Gas Company), 13-14, 17
North Park College, Chicago, 12
Number Seven Mine, 11

oiler, 7
operator, 7

Peabody (mine), 10, 12, 14, 16
Pennsylvania, (fossils), 10, 16
Peoria, 16
Philippine Islands, 16
picnicking, 13
"pocket", (fossil), 14
Polish nationality, 5
Post Office, 8

railroad, 6, 7, 17
recreation area, 13
Rettenmyer, Mr., 13
Richardson, Dr., 16
Rigney, Reverend, teacher, 16
Rock Island Railroad, 7
Route 113, 13

Santa Fe Railroad, 7
school, 8
scientists, 9
Scotch nationality, 5, 13
Skimmer, Mr., mine owner, 5-6
son, Bill, 12-13
Southern Illinois, 12
South Wilmington, 11, 13
Star Mining Company, 11
strip mine (mining), 5-6, 10-11, 15
Suffernville, 15
sulfur, 15

Thompson, Mr. Fred, 16-17
trains, 7

vegetation (fossils), 10
Verona, 6, 11

wallpaper mill, 12
Washington, D. C., 9
Weimer, Mr., 13
Williamson family, candy-makers, 6
Wilmington, 5-6, 13-14
Wilmington Recreation Clubs, 13
Wilson, Dr., 12
wire rope factory, 6, 12
World War I, 12
World War II, 12